

Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, Helena Branch  
400 N. Park  
Helena  
Lewis and Clark County  
Montana

HABS No. MT-72

HABS  
MONT,  
25-HEL,  
12-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Building Survey  
National Park Service  
Rocky Mountain Regional Office  
Department of the Interior  
P.O. Box 25287  
Denver, Colorado 80225

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION

Historic American Buildings Survey

Architectural Data Form

HABS  
MONT.

25-HEL,  
12-

STATE Montana	COUNTY Lewis and Clark	TOWN OR VICINITY Helena	HAB'S NO. MT-72
HISTORIC NAME OF STRUCTURE (INCLUDE SOURCE FOR NAME) Federal Reserve Bank - 1937-1938			

SECONDARY OR COMMON NAMES OF STRUCTURE

COMPLETE ADDRESS (DESCRIBE LOCATION FOR RURAL SITES)  
400 N. Park Avenue

DATE OF CONSTRUCTION (INCLUDE SOURCE) 1938 (Federal Reserve Bank Records, Minneapolis, Minn.)	ARCHITECT(S) (INCLUDE SOURCE) George H. Shanley
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SIGNIFICANCE (ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL, INCLUDE ORIGINAL USE OF STRUCTURE)  
The Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, Helena Branch building is historically significant because of its importance to the finance and commerce of Helena and its significance to banking in the region. The bank is the smallest branch of the Federal Reserve system in the nation yet it served an essential function during the national economic crisis of the 1930s acting as an agency of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation. The building is architecturally significant for its association with George H. Shanley, a prominent early twentieth century Montana architect. (See attached narrative.)

STYLE (IF APPROPRIATE) Art deco

MATERIAL OF CONSTRUCTION (INCLUDE STRUCTURAL SYSTEMS)  
poured-in-place steel-reinforced concrete

SHAPE AND DIMENSIONS OF STRUCTURE (SKETCHED FLOOR PLANS ON SEPARATE PAGES ARE ACCEPTABLE

rectangular - 68 x 100 ft

EXTERIOR FEATURES OF NOTE  
See attached.

INTERIOR FEATURES OF NOTE (DESCRIBE FLOOR PLANS, IF NOT SKETCHED)  
See attached.

MAJOR ALTERATIONS AND ADDITIONS WITH DATES  
Second story, 1947

PRESENT CONDITION AND USE  
Good - Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, Helena Branch

OTHER INFORMATION AS APPROPRIATE

SOURCES OF INFORMATION (INCLUDE LISTING ON NATIONAL REGISTER, STATE REGISTERS, ETC.)  
(See attached bibliography at end of narrative.)

COMPILER, AFFILIATION Brian L. Shovers, Historian - GCM Services, Inc., 1003 S. Montana Street, Butte, Montana 59702	DATE 11/19/87
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EXTERIOR FEATURES OF NOTE (continued)      Federal Reserve Bank Helena

The most distinguishing feature of this concrete Art deco building is its streamlined facade which is accented by the entry with its plain inset columns, its brass-plated doors, and a brass plated name plate over the door that reads: "Helena Branch, Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis". The building is divided into three parts with projecting pilasters on either with a single row of windows and alternating recessed panels beneath. The central part of the front facade contains a set of four windows (metal sash) on either side of the entry (30 lites). The second story, added to the original building in 1946, contains 10 windows (two lites on top with an awning opening on bottom), and there is an egg and dart decorated frieze between the first and second floors. The basement is lit by four windows on either side of the entry with 30 lites within each metal sash. Each side of the building is divided into three bays with the bays on either end recessed. Five long windows (42 lites) light both the north and south sides of the building. On the southwest corner of the building there is a garage and a chimney on the flat roof at that corner. A lawn separates the building from the street and there is a parking lot on the north side of the building. A granite stairs and a pipe rail lead to the entry and there is a flagpole atop the roof.

INTERIOR FEATURES OF NOTE (continued)

Federal Reserve Bank - Helena

The entry lobby has marble wall panels and a glass enclosed security booth. In the main room there is a long row of wooden teller windows set on a marble paneled base, behind which is a 27-ton circular vault door. The ceiling has widely spaced beams running from west to east and an egg and dart terra cotta frieze surrounding the perimeter between the ceiling and the walls. The wall and lighting treatment has been altered over the years. The interior of the Otis elevator makes use of Art deco design and ornamentation. Both the main floor and the second floor have large open spaces and numerous small office cubicles. The basement contains heating and cooling systems, vaults and various elements of the security system.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, Helena Branch, an Art deco style building designed by prominent Montana architect, George H. Shanley, was erected at 400 North Park Avenue in 1938 within the heart of Helena's banking and commercial district. While the Helena Branch represents the smallest branch office of the Federal Reserve System its importance to Montana economic stability during the national economic crisis of the 1930s and its role with the war bond efforts during the 1940s lend historical significance to this structure. The establishment of a Federal Reserve Branch in Helena in 1920 and the construction of a new building in 1938 helped to sustain Helena's historical role as a focus of Montana financial and governmental affairs.<sup>1</sup>

The Federal Reserve System created a branch of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis in 1920, just six years after the establishment of the system. When the Board of Governors authorized the creation of eighteen branch banks in 1919 Helena was not being considered. The lobbying efforts of Norman B. Holter, a member of a prominent Montana mining family and a member of the Board of Directors for the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, helped bring the attributes of Montana's capital city as a banking center to the attention of the Board of Governors. A formal presentation by bank presidents from Great Falls, Helena and Butte before the Board of Governors sought to demonstrate the need for a full service branch to serve the needs of commercial banks in the region between Minneapolis and Spokane. The Board of Governors responded positively to the request and work began on the bank building in 1920.<sup>2</sup>

The new Federal Reserve Branch in Helena was established to provide a wide variety of banking services including the distribution of coin and currency to commercial banks throughout the region, the collection of checks, drafts and coupons, the transfer of funds, loans to member banks and to act as a

depository for the U.S. Treasury. Beginning in February 1921 the new branch operated out of an old two-story telephone company, located at Park and Edwards Street, that had been remodeled at a cost of more than \$162,000. The high cost of remodeling the 1909 brick building can be partially attributed to the steps taken to provide the necessary security for a bank straddling the abandoned gold diggings and tunnels along Last Chance Gulch.<sup>3</sup>

The Helena Branch opened in 1921 with a staff of thirty-six employees and officers. The original Board of Directors included T. A. Marlow of the National Bank of Montana in Helena; Charles J. Kelly of the Metals Bank and Trust of Butte; H. W. Rowley of the Northern Holding Company of Billings; R. O. Kampman of the Union Bank and Trust of Helena; and Lee M. Ford of the Great Falls National Bank of Great Falls. The number of employees quickly jumped to sixty-six as the Helena Branch was designated a custodian for the War Finance Corporation loan program. Just as quickly the staff returned to normal levels with the closure of more than 200 banks in Montana by 1927. For a short time in the early 1930s the branch bank served as the Montana headquarters for agencies of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation and the Regional Agricultural Credit Corporation. In 1933 the Board of Governors requested that each Branch bank prepare a justification for their continued operation and the Helena Branch successfully substantiated the need for its services within the region. As the Helena Branch services expanded and its directors contemplated the need for more floor space, the worst recorded earthquake in Helena history occurred, damaging the manager's office and the main vault. The initial recommendation from the Board of Governors in 1936 called for the repair and expansion of the existing Branch bank but the Helena Board of Directors finally prevailed, convincing those in Minneapolis of the need for a larger building.<sup>4</sup>

Two sites were available for a new building: the corner of North Park and Placer for \$3500 and the current site, also on Park Street, for \$20,000.

The Board of Directors eventually acquired the property for \$15,000 and George H. Shanley of Great Falls was chosen as the architect. The architect Shanley, born in Vermont in 1877, moved to Duluth, Minnesota in late nineteenth century to study and work with Gerhart A. Tenbush. Shanley moved to Montana in 1898 where he formed the firm of Gibson and Shanley in the growing town of Kalispell. Two years later Shanley arrived in the mining city of Butte where he set up practice with an architect by the name of Kent. Shanley designed a number of prominent buildings in Butte including the Finlen Hotel, the main pavilion at Columbia Gardens and the Immaculate Conception school and convent. In 1907 Shanley moved to Great Falls where he designed the Liberty Theater, Rainbow Hotel and the First National Bank. In 1937 Shanley received a \$100,000 contract to design and build the Branch bank in Helena. In May 1938 the Helena Branch moved into the new building, beginning a era of expanded activity for this satellite of the Minneapolis Federal Reserve Bank.<sup>5</sup>

Activities at the Helena Branch changed over the years between 1938 and 1946 as the role of the Federal Reserve expanded with national crises. The bank in Helena served as custodian for the following newly created federal corporations: the Federal National Mortgage Association, Commodity Credit Corporation, Defense Homes Corporation, Defense Plant Corporation, Defense Supplies Corporation, Rubber Reserve Corporation, Metals Reserve Corporation and the War Assets Corporation. In 1942 the Fiscal Agency Department of the U.S. Treasury assigned the task of handling Savings Bond sales and accounting for all Montana banks. The expansion of bank tasks led to a demand for more space and in 1946 a second floor was added to the original bank structure. The addition successfully maintained the character of this Art deco style building.<sup>6</sup>

The Helena Branch bank building has both architectural and historical significance. The structural system employed in the bank building, poured-in-place steel-reinforced concrete, and its architectural style, Art deco,

both achieved prominence in American architecture during the 1930s and 1940s. Numerous public building--schools and post offices--can be found throughout Montana and the nation at large dating from this era. The Shanley building and its 1946 addition are well-preserved representations of that period style and construction techniques. The building's association with George Shanley, a Montana architect of some stature from the period, also lends significance to the bank. The building draws historical significance from its central role in regional banking affairs from 1920 to the present. The services rendered by the Helena Branch during the national economic crisis of the 1930s and during the world war in the 1940s add historical significance to the bank building that reach beyond Montana's borders. Since its construction in 1938 the Shanley building has been an important landmark within Helena's historic commercial district along Last Chance Gulch.



FOOTNOTES

1. Glen Martin, Planning Report on Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, Helena Branch (Helena: Helena Branch of Federal Reserve Bank, 1981), p. 1.
2. Martin, Planning Report, p. 2.
3. Martin, Planning Report, p. 2, 4.
4. Martin, Planning Report, p. 4-7.
5. Martin, Planning Report, p. 8. Men of Affairs and Representative Institutions of the State of Montana 1914 (Butte: Butte Newswriters' Assoc., 1914). Dale Martin and Brian Shovera, Butte, Montana: An Architectural and Historical Inventory of the National Landmark District (Butte: Butte Historical Society, 1986), p. 116-117.
6. Your Bank: Historical Sketches of Montana Banks and Bankers (Helena: Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, Helena Branch, 1946), p. 110-111.

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